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THE KINGDOM OF ALL-SOULS

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THE KINGDOM OF ALL-SOULS
AND TWO OTHER POEMS
FOR CHRISTMAS

BY
GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

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PREFACE

PREFACE

THESE three poems, though written without reference to one another, have a slight element in common which may perhaps excuse their being placed together, in that they are all poems of expectancy, in the mood of faith in the unimagined future. They have a touch of prophetic conviction, and that atmosphere of largeness of world-hope which is a trait of our time.

They are grounded in personal feeling and reality, and the first of them is charged with specific allusions to my own experience which may not be sufficiently self-explanatory. The editor who published it, for example, desired more light on what I meant by the "youth" in the Sicilian mine, whom he took to be a symbolical figure. I seldom deal in symbolisms; if there be hidden meanings in my verse, they are there without my knowledge. I

wrote him a letter in reply, and he quoted a passage from it in publishing the poem, in order to protect the reader from the pitfall which he had found. The passage was as follows:

“What I actually saw is just what I say I saw. The incident made a deep impression on me. I went down into a sulphur-mine in a remote corner of Sicily, and after a while I began to wonder where I was coming out (I knew there was a lower exit) and asked. I was told that I would come back the same way, as only the sulphur got out by the lower exit on a rail that was worked by a rope apparently. The descent had been hard, by great zig-zag steps cut in the rock, dark and slimy, and I knew the ascent would be harder still. So I stopped,—the engineer went down to the bottom on some business, and left me in a small cavity beside the tunnel (with the track) with two or three miners to look after me. It was pitch-black except

for our candles, it was very hot,—and I sat, with as little on as possible, talking with the miners, who wanted to know of our American mines (Louisiana, I suppose) and whether they could get work there. Then this youth came along the gallery with his torch and went by; but having seen me he came back to get some *soldi*. He was naked, as the others were practically, and the light of his torch showed the figure in the darkness; he was eighteen or less, I should say, and his pose as he held out his hand was as perfect as you can imagine for a simple action in which his body, the place, all, joined,—it was a perfect expression of poverty. What struck me, however, was the extraordinary resemblance the lines of his figure bore to the archaic Apollos at Athens (there is one at Naples), in which the body seems stiffened in its material as if the artist could not free the form from the stone. That living body was just the

same, stiffened in its lines just so; and this youth so seen was as perfect a piece of archaic art as I ever saw. It made an indelible impression on my eye,—and on my heart, too. If I have so suggested the scene to you in verse that it sets your mind forging its symbolisms, so much the better; but in the poem I had no intention of drawing out explicit symbolisms myself.—So of the stars, though no one will believe it, I *saw* those ‘forms in the gold;’ and the poem is consciously visionary only in the ‘Spirit.’ I never saw my other self, but if I should, it would be something like that.”

The incident of the stars, here referred to, is fully described in the account of my North African travels, which will, I expect, shortly be published serially in Scribner’s. A third allusion to my own experience occurs in the fourth stanza. At the state-prison at Nauplia, in Greece, the convicts fabricate an iron stamp, which

is used to imprint the Christian symbol IHS on the Easter bread. I was very much shocked by that. The thought toward the end of the poem,—“past the sensual, past the moral,”—contains a Nietzschean element, which is found elsewhere in my later verse. I picked up a volume by Nietzsche, then unknown to me, quite by accident in a book-store at Athens, eight years ago, and was so struck by it that I bought it. The translation was in Italian, “La Gaia Scienza.” I afterwards bought and read all his works; and little sympathetic as I am with the doctrines of the Super-Man by which he is most known, there was much in his discursive mind which was kindred to my own solitary musing and brooding in those Mediterranean years. I felt him, like the call of a voice in the unknown before me. I fear I am less one of the million “We Americans” than of the few “Us Europeans.” I was always doubly conscious, *Le Voya-*

geur et son Ombre; and my heart, at least, has knowledge *Par delà le Bien et le Mal*; *Aurore* might have served as the title of this little book; and if I have not talked with Zarathustra, there are those in our small company who have. Nietzsche was an original and powerful genius, perhaps with the eccentric, proud wilfulness of a natural leader of men's minds. I know no modern thinker with such a fire-flow in him, the vital burst, *la vie*. I think of him as what I have found most rare in life, either among men or books,—a companion on my way. I dare say I should have found him, in real life, quite impossible; but, safely walled apart by time and space and death, we are friends in the spirit. From him, too, as you already observe, I took the title of the third poem.

The second of the three poems records the memory of a night which I and my guides, having lost our way, spent in the desert between Biskra and Tougourt,—

an incident also more fully described in my African papers.

This book will come, it is hoped, as a Christmas gift to its readers. It bears to all, and especially to the once young (perhaps still so) who were of old my charge at Columbia and elsewhere, my holiday greetings, fresh as in those days. May something of the joy and promise of the ancient Christmas, and of the eternal hopefulness of the New Year in this old world that is forever being re-born, be in its words and music as the soul of the book comes forth to greet the soul of its friends!—*À toi le bonheur!*

G. E. W.

THE KINGDOM OF ALL-SOULS

THE KINGDOM OF ALL-SOULS

I HEARD in my youth of a Kingdom, lying far at
the whole world's end,
And pilgrim-wise I clothed myself in my boyhood
there to wend;
Through the beautiful, the dutiful, the holy high-
way ran,
So was I told, and it stretched through the midst
of all the glory of man;
And all men spoke of the Kingdom, when they
looked on my face of joy,
And the souls of the dead spun the golden thread
in the heart of the silent boy.
So I lived with beauty and duty long; and I flour-
ished in noble years;
But I came not nigh to the Kingdom thereby; and
my youth was thronged with fears;
For he who seeks only the Kingdom, goes lonely,
however it be at the prime;
Now, in man's estate, perplexed, desolate, I looked
forward and back through time.

For a curious thing had happened in the lands
where eternally
Blows the mighty breath of the Trades of Death
by the old remembering sea;

Incredible was the leap and sweep of my astonished
sense;
Stars in their burning unveiled to me yearning
their spirit-throngs intense;
And on glimmering seas Tripolitan borne, bright
as to Jacob's eye,
I saw, all the night, forms whose substance was
light move in the gold on high;
And on earth the fire-fountains and snowy moun-
tains that first poured the power of man,
Blue blown spaces and sandy places where his
racing raptures ran;
And whatever his soul has fashioned fairest, carved
or painted or sung,
On my eyes, in my ears, on my moving lips, ever
divinely hung.

Then was I ware in my mystic self of a discord
shaping there,
And a darkness filmed my outward eye and netted
the visual air;
Man in the strife of his sorrowing life had such
power upon my sight;
In the stench and murk of Sicilian mines I lost my
ways of light;
For a youth with a torch came gazing on me, with
the nude archaic line

That I loved in the marbles of Athens, and the fire
of his soul sank in mine;
The woe of his eyes, the want of his limbs, the
intimate look of his soul, —
Who shall measure the wave of passion that from
spirit to spirit may roll!
And, year after year, grew poverty dear; and thereat
I wondered then,
That my soul issued first unto wan lives accurst in
the loveliest lands of men.

Then I said to my Spirit beside me tall: “I have
fear—this is some charm
That the Impish Ones have wrought upon me to
do me malignant harm,
That for the blood-wasted and beauty-blasted I lay
bright worship by, —
Hover above it—sink in it—love it,—’t is some
charm of the Evil Eye!”
But my Spirit beside gathered height in his pride.
Then a greater wonder arose,
Whereat my delicate being aloof with the horror
thereof froze;
For I saw in the den of a prison-pen, on a peak of
Argos’ coast,
Men whom whips compel, mould as in hell the
matrix of the Host;

Murderers, thieves, and every brood of dark and
heinous sin
Forged in that shed the seal of God's Bread, that
stamps Christ's name therein.

Since then I have taken man's hands in mine, and
nevermore felt shame,
Such unearthly light upon my soul-sight in that
flooding moment came ;
And I mixed with all races in primitive places,
wherever we might meet,
In the gangway of the nations, drunken tavern,
desert street ;
And I saw men's souls unsheltered and bare, as one
seeth eye to eye, —
This the wonder, this the marvel, that my nature,
all awry,
Trembling ever turned most truly to the lower and
the worse.
Then I said, abashed, to my Spirit, who flashed :
“This is some terrible curse
That Heavenly Wrath sends on my path, that I
lose from my soul the awe
Of all justice human, eternal, — I, who was born
in the law !”

Then my Spirit brightened as a cloud that lightened ; and I heard o'er confusions within
The Voice that comes over chaos when a new world shall begin :
"I have cleansed thy eyes of beauty ; I have cleansed thy heart of duty ;
I am soul that brightens from thee, seeing spiritual beauty, —
Greatens, doing spiritual duty ; incorruptible is spirit, —
Nought to thee the vesture meaneth, gleam or gloom that men inherit ;
Thou art waking in the Kingdom, where through shadows half-divined
The dark planet moves up slowly to the glory of the mind ;
Past the sensual, past the moral, now thy being newly rolls, —
Thou art living, thou art breathing, in the Kingdom of All-Souls !"

I lay in the darkness hushed and o'erawed, as the sense of the words sank in, —
One human spirit that all men inherit, undeprived by their woe or their sin ;
No curst servile races, no virtue-throned places! —
and splendors o'er me ran, —

Above me immense, gathering light intense, with
the beautiful form of man,
The Spirit stood bright in angelical might, and his
countenance beamed afar,
Born with our birth for dominion o'er earth, Master
and Lord of our Star ;
Heaven shook with the rays from his arrowy hand,
and the stars in the zenith grew wan, —
I saw, I know, in that mighty glow the foregleam
of some dawn ;
And as a gold pillar of sunrise that flamed, and a
mounting glory showered,
Majestical over my dark form that soul of morning
towered.

WHAT THE STARS SANG IN THE DESERT

WHAT THE STARS SANG
IN THE DESERT

I WOKE in the desert rude
O'erhung by the star-sweet sky,
And ever the radiant multitude
In the silence drew more nigh,
As if on my eyes to brood,
And inward glory nurse,
And out of the heart of the universe
Soared forth my singing cry :

“ We are young — our song up-springing
The crystal blue along,
Creation's morning singing, —
It was but children-song,
Melodiously ringing,
Mysteriously forewarning
The realm beyond the morning
We infinitely throng.

“ We sit in our burning spheres
Illimitably hung ;
By the speed of light we measure the years
On purple ether flung ;
Without a shadow time appears,
A calendar of echoing lights

That flame and dusk from depths and heights,
And all our years are young.

“ We are borne through darkness streaming
Wherein our glory glides ;
We dower the deep with the beaming
Where prophecy resides ;
Forevermore we are dreaming,
Still in the springtime blossom
Of thoughts that light our bosom
And beat our glowing sides.

“ Wide the abyss ; we span it,
Who showering a bright spark came ;
And forever we smite it and fan it
Forth from the forging flame,—
Life, flower of the planet,
Flower of the fire, supernal,
Burning, blooming eternal,—
A million names are his name.

“ We tremble ; we thrill heaven’s ocean
With the myriad-glittering quest ;
Aspiration and devotion
From the prime were our brooding nest ;
And youth,—’t is breathed emotion,
A seeing and a hearkening,

A gleaming and a darkening,
And a whispering to the breast.

“Then with bright hands uplifted
We strike the thousand lyres;
The music, on dreams drifted,
Pours all the world’s desires;
And ever the song is sifted
From the heart of youth forecasting
The unknown everlasting
That bathes us and inspires.

“We gaze on the far flood flowing
Unimaginably free,
Multitudinous, mystical, glowing,
But all we do not see;
And a rapture is all our knowing,
That on fiery nerves comes stealing,
An intimate revealing
That all is yet to be.

“When sheathed and glacial o’er us
Arcturus courses cold,
And dry and dark before us
Aldebaran is rolled,
Far-clustering orbs in chorus
Shall light the pealing sky,

And throne to throne reply,
 'The heavens grow not old.'"

Round the desert wild and eerie
 The starry echoes clung ;
In a region weird and dreary
 The golden song was sung ;
 Over lands forlorn and weary,
 Where the drifting white sand only
Drifts anew the sand-wreath lonely,
 The radiant silence hung.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

I RODE in the dark of the spirit
A marvellous, marvellous way ;
The faiths that the races inherit
Behind in the sunset lay ;
Dome, mosque, and temple huddled
Bade farewell to the day ;
But I rode into the leagues of the dark,
There was no light but my hoof-beats' spark
That sprang from that marvellous way.

Behind were the confined gods in their shroud
Of jungle, desert, and mound,
The mighty man-bones and the mummies proud
Stark in their caves underground ;
And the planet that sepulchres god and man,
Bore me in the cone of its dark profound
To the ultimate clash in stellar space,
The way of the dead, god-making race
Whirled with its dead gods round.

And my heart, as the night grew colder,
Drew near to the heart of my steed ;
I had pillowed my head on his shoulder
Long years in the sand and the reed ;

Long ago he was foaled of the Muses,
And sired of the heroes' deed;
And he came unto me by the fountain
Of the old Hellenic mountain,
And of heaven is his breed.

So my heart grew near to the heart of my horse,
Who was wiser, far wiser than I;
Yet wherever I leaned in my spirit's course,
He swayed, and questioned not why;
And this was because he was born above,
A child of the beautiful sky;
And now we were come to the kingdoms black,
And nevermore should we journey back
To the land where dead men lie.

Now whether or not in that grewsome air
My soul was seized by the dread *cafard*,
Terror of deserts, I cannot swear;
But I rode straight into an orbèd star,
Where only reigned the spirit of good,
And only the holy and virtuous are;
And my horse's eyes sent forth sun-rays,
And in my own was a noon-tide gaze
That mastered that splendid star.

The madness of deserts, if so it be,
 Burned in my brain, and I saw
The multitudinous progeny
 Of the talon and the claw;
And Mammon in all their palaces
 Gaped with a golden maw;
And we rode far off from the glittering roofs,
And the horse, as he passed, with his heaven-shod
 hoofs
 Broke the tables of their law.

And we came to a city adjacent thereby,
 For the twain to one Empire belong;
Black over it hung a terrible cry
 From eternal years of wrong;
And the land, it was full of gallows and prisons
 And the horrible deeds of the strong;
And we fled; but the flash of my horse's feet
Broke open the jails in every street,
 And lightning burned there long.

We were past the good and the evil,
 In the spirit's uttermost dark;
He is neither god nor devil
 For whom my heart-beats hark;
And I leaned my cheek to my horse's neck,
 And I sang to his ear in the dark:

“There is neither good nor evil,
There is neither god nor devil,
And our way lies on through the dark.

“Once I saw by a throne
A burning angel who cried, —
'I will suffer all woes that man's spirit has known,'
And he plunged in the turbid tide;
And wherever he sank with that heart of love,
He rose up purified;
Glowed brighter his limbs and his beautiful face,
And he went not back to the heavenly place,
And he drew all men to his side.

“I have never heard it or learnt it,
It is in me like my soul,
And the sights of this world have burnt it
In me to a living coal, —
The soul of man is a masterless thing
And bides not another's control;
And gypsy-broods of bandit-loins
Shall teach what the lawless life enjoins
Upon the lawless soul.

“When we dare neither to loose nor to bind,
However to us things appear;

When whatsoever in others we find,
We shall feel neither shame nor fear;
When we learn that to love the lowliest
We must first salute him our peer;
When the basest is most our brother,
And we neither look down on nor up to another,—
The end of our ride shall be near.’’

A wind arose from the dreadful past,
And the sand smoked on the knoll;
I saw, blown by the bolts of the blast,
The shreds of the Judgment scroll;
I heard the death-spasms of Justice old
Under the seas and the mountains roll;
Then the horse who had borne me through all
disaster,
Turned blazing eyes upon me his master,
For the thoughts I sing are his soul.

And I sang in his ear,—“ ’T is the old world dying
Whose death-cries through heaven are rolled;
Through the souls of men a flame is flying
That shall a new firmament mould;
And the uncreated light in man’s spirit
Shall sun, moon, and stars unfold;’’

Then the horse snuffed the dark with his nostrils
bright,
And he strode, and he stretched, and he neighed
to the light
That shall beam at the word to be told.

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